

Transform Baltimore

Build Schools. Build Neighborhoods.

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By electronic mail

Dear Members of the MOU Negotiating team:

The *Transform Baltimore: Build Schools, Build Neighborhoods* campaign launched support for an alternative financing plan for Baltimore City school construction and was heartened by the passage of HB860 in the 2013 legislative session, for Phase I of City School's 21st Century Buildings Initiative. Working with dozens of school, neighborhood, and advocacy groups, we remain critically interested in the plan and look forward to supporting effective implementation of the program's financing and construction.

As you collectively finalize the Memorandum of Understanding in the coming weeks, the *Transform Baltimore* campaign writes to emphasize how essential it is that there be transparency, with strong public reporting and communication, on the 21st Century Building Program ("Program"). The Program's use of public dollars from the city, state, and city school system and the high interest both locally and nationally argue for the program to be a model of transparency and open access to information and decision-making.

We request that your committee incorporate the following recommendations into the Memorandum of Understanding:

1. Open meetings. The meetings (whether monthly regular meetings or special ones) of the Executive/Steering Committee ("Committee") should be open meetings held on dates advertised on the City Schools' or other accessible website. It should be made clear that unless a discussion item or document cannot be shared for a legitimate legal reason, such as sealed bid packages, that documents and reports should be considered public information and shared with the citizens of the city and the state.

Meeting minutes and documents to be discussed should be available for review at the meetings.

2. Availability of written reports. The Stat process will produce a lot of data which will be turned into a variety of reports. It is important that reports on the progress of the plan as a whole, and of the individual projects, analyses, and audits be available in a timely way. Whenever reports are generated for the Committee (e.g., monthly), then those reports should be available to the public on a website and in hard copy at meetings at which they are presented. When the Program prepares reports, updates, presentations (for legislative committees, for instance), those should be available on a public site.
3. Public forums to present the progress reports, with "Q & A" from the public. As the Program or Committee generates reports, there are a number of ways that regular updates could be reported "in person" to parents, teachers, and community members. We believe it is important that the format for presentation of reports be forums that allow for public questions and answers, as opposed solely to report-outs to legislative committees, the school board, or city council.

City Schools and the MSA should schedule meetings that will allow the public to ask questions about this information and engage the stakeholders in meaningful dialogue about the status of their school's progress and the program at large.

Forums might be held quarterly in different quadrants of the city for people in those local planning areas to ask questions, ensuring that each area of the city would have at least one yearly "town hall" style meeting to have their issues addressed. City Schools has indicated that meetings will be held at individual schools for those communities whose schools are impacted. But those school-based meetings would not be sufficient to take the place of a regular program overview report-out for anyone in the community to attend.

Transform Baltimore offers to help organize the forums, in conjunction with the Board of School Commissioners or others.

As you reach the critical juncture of finalizing the MOU, it will be important to announce how communication between the public and the Committee is going to take place in coming years. Openness, timely reporting, and good communication with stakeholders will help build confidence in this Program, so important to the children of Baltimore City.

Thank you for your efforts and work this summer to meet the MOU deadline and to position the Program for success.

For the *Transform Baltimore* campaign,

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Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
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Hon. Thomas V. "Mike" Miller, President MD Senate
Hon. Bernard "Jack" Young, President, Baltimore City Council
Hon. Verna Jones, Chair, Baltimore City Senate Delegation
Hon. Curt Anderson, Chair, Baltimore City Delegation
Hon. Edward Kasemeyer, Chairman, Senate Budget & Taxation
Dr. Shanaysha Sauls, Chair, Board of School Commissioners
Hon. Norman Conway, Chairman, House Appropriations
Hon. Rich Madeleno, MD Senate
Hon. John Bohanan, MD House of Delegates